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SUBJECT: ANKARA MEDIA REACTION REPORT

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 14, 2007

In Today's Papers

New Constitution Draft Finalized, Unveiled Soon

All papers report a new constitution drafted by the ruling AKP increases the powers of the prime minister while the powers of the president are cut broadly. The draft removes restrictions on freedom of religion, the definition of Turkishness, the official language and mother tongue, and the headscarf. It recognizes religious and sectarian differences with an eye to secure the rights of Alevis who have complained they have not been represented in the Religious Affairs Directorate (Diyanet).

Papers report an 18-member delegation of cabinet ministers, the ruling AKP lawmakers, and jurists arrived in the northwestern Sapanca town near Istanbul to assess the new constitution drafted by a group of academics under the chairmanship of Professor Ergun Ozbudun. PM Erdogan is expected to join the group over the weekend and the draft will likely be finalized on Sunday.

Another Explosive-Laden Van Seized in Ankara

Hurriyet, Sabah, Milliyet, Cumhuriyet and Zaman report Ankara had another bomb scare, only days after a massive car bomb was found in downtown city: a van carrying 500 kg of TNT, coming from Sweden, was seized in the capital. Two Swedes and two Turks were detained. Late Thursday, security authorities announced that, acting on a tip-off by Bulgarian customs officials, they intercepted a van which had entered Turkey through the Kapikule border gate with Bulgaria. Zaman reports the Swedes said the explosives were imported by the state-owned ordnance factory MKE.

Erdogan to Visit the US Late September

Cumhuriyet, Zaman and Yeni Safak report Prime Minister Erdogan is to travel to the US on September 24 to participate in the UN General Assembly meetings New York where he is expected to hold bilateral talks with various heads of state and government. On September 26, Erdogan will visit the NYSE and address the Turkish-American Association (TAA) later the same day. The PM is also expected to

deliver a speech at the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) on September 27, according to papers.

High Court Overturns Acquittal of Kaboglu, Oran

All papers report the Supreme Court of Appeals (Yargitay) on Thursday overturned an earlier decision by a local court in Ankara which acquitted two prominent academics last year over a government-sponsored human rights report criticizing the treatment of minority groups. The trial process of former Prime Ministry Human Rights Advisory Board members, professors Ibrahim Kaboglu and Baskin Oran, was closely followed by the EU as a case of freedom of expression. Kaboglu and Oran resigned from the board in early 2005 amid heavy criticism.

Although they were charged with "inciting hatred" and "insulting judicial organs" in the report, the professors were found not guilty in May 2006, with the court dropping charges due to Justice Ministry's failure to approve the case.

Oran called the Yargitay decision "a contradiction," especially at a time when public opinion has been heatedly debating how to create a civilian constitution. He called on the government to abolish certain articles of the penal code before drafting a democratic constitution.

Burns Addresses Atlantic Council on Turkey

Turkey's prestigious all-news broadcaster NTV reported Friday morning from Washington that Under Secretary Nicholas Burns said in a speech he delivered at Atlantic Council that the US is looking forward to working with President Gul and Prime Minister Erdogan, "allies and friends of the US." Burns warned Turkey against entering into energy agreements with Iran, and urged the reopening of the border with Armenia and a normalization of ties with Yerevan.

Burns noted the US would support a new Cyprus initiative coming

ANKARA 00002347 002 OF 003

from the UN; he also reiterated support for Turkey's EU membership. Burns also called for the abolishment of Turkish Penal Code Article 301 which restricts free speech, and the reopening of Halki Seminary in Istanbul. NTV also reported Burns would be visiting Turkey next week.

President Bush's Ramadan Message

Mainstream Milliyet reports, under the headline "Message of Compassion for Ramadan," President Bush sent his "greetings to Muslims observing Ramadan in America and around the world." "America is a land of many faiths, and our society is enriched by our Muslim citizens. May the holy days of Ramadan remind us all to seek a culture of compassion and serve others in charity," the President is quoted as saying.

Turkey-Northern Iraq Trade Declining

Mainstream Milliyet reports trade between Turkey and northern Iraq, expected to amount to USD 5 billion, has started to diminish because of fears over a possible Turkish military operation into the region against the PKK terrorists. In the spring the supermarkets in northern Iraq were full of Turkish products, which are gradually replaced by goods from Jordan, Syria and Europe. Turkish businessmen in the region say Turkish companies wanted to complete their contracts and to return to Turkey. Milliyet says economic ties with the region are weakening due to factors such as the difficulties regarding shipment of goods to northern Iraq through Habur border gate, delays in payments made to Turkish businessmen, and recent terrorist attacks in Kirkuk and Erbil.

7,000 Cholera Cases in Northern Iraq

Islamist-oriented Yeni Safak reports health officials in Iraq said Thursday that about 7,000 cholera cases were seen in Kirkuk and Suleymaniye in northern Iraq. The World Health Organization (WHO) said the disease could spread to surrounding cities and as far as Baghdad due to the non-hygiene water system in the country. Ten people have died of the disease.

Editorial Commentary on Iraq, 9/11

Sami Kohen comments in the mainstream daily Milliyet: "The postponement of the Kirkuk referendum is not a surprising development. Turkish diplomats have been intensively working toward

the postponement with the US as well as Iraqi groups and Iraq's neighbors. Despite the official rhetoric which ties the decision to technical reasons, more political reasons than technical ones are behind it. With the decision, the potential danger for conflict in Kirkuk -- which might drag other countries -- has been eliminated. The Turkish government wants to see consensus reached within the various ethnic and religious groups before the actual referendum. If a unifying formula can be reached on the Kirkuk issue, it will be seen as a potential model for unity all over Iraq. On the other hand, recent political developments do not provide any signal for reconciliation among the various groups of Iraq. The Maliki government is not capable of ruling with full authority. Shiites and Sunnis are not only fighting with each other, but they are also having fights internally."

Haluk Ulman writes in the business-political daily Dunya: "As far as terrorism is concerned, six years after the 9/11 attacks the world is less secure than it was in 2001. Bin Laden has not been captured and he remains the leader of al-Qaeda. He even manages to continue his televised propaganda. President Bush invaded Iraq with the excuse of ending international terrorism, which worked to the full advantage of Bin Laden. The Iraq war helped al-Qaeda recruit new members from all over the Arab world. Thanks to President Bush, al-Qaeda, unlike before the war, is now actively operating in Iraq. From the international political perspective, six years after 9/11, the world is more unstable and is poised for potential dangerous developments, in the Middle East region in particular. There is a growing possibility of the regional map changing along with the division of Iraq. The Afghanistan-Pakistan line is another

ANKARA 00002347 003 OF 003

potential danger for the world's future. If the presence of al-Qaeda in this region cannot be eliminated, the threat will spread even to the NATO mission in Afghanistan. In sum, six years of the fight against terrorism does not give a comforting picture at all."

TV Highlights
NTV, 7.00 A.M.

Domestic News

- On a four-day tour of east and southeast Turkey, President Abdullah Gul arrived Thursday in Siirt where he was greeted by a joyful crowd of locals chanting, "Turkey is proud of you." The president will be visiting Diyarbakir today, where he will meet local businessmen and NGO representatives.
- A remote-control landmine planted by the PKK terrorists on the railway in the southeastern province of Bingol went off, slightly injuring two drivers and derailing five cars.
- Nobel Prize winning novelist Orhan Pamuk told BBC Radio 3 that moderate Muslims are more respectful of democracy compared to staunch secularists in Turkey.

International News

- FOX News television reported a recent decision by Germany to withhold support for new sanctions against Iran has pushed officials in Washington to develop potential scenarios for a military attack on Iran.
- President Ahmadinejad said his government would be able to help calm Iraq if the US and Britain drop their hostile attitude towards Iran.
- The London-based International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) said in a report released Wednesday a resilient al-Qaeda can still carry out "spectacular" attacks in Western countries even if not one on the scale of "9/11."

WILSON